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UPPER CASTE HINDU WOMEN WERE MORE AFFILICTED THAN MUSLIM WOMEN UNDER MUGHAL ERA 1526-1707

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Abstract:

It is universally known that Mughal period was known for political stability and economical prosperity but it is strange to know that many evils were prevalent in society. Sati pratha & Jauar pratha were dreadful mainly to upper class of Hindu women while Polygamy and Purdah system deprived of freedom and education to Muslim women. Monogamy was prevalent in Hindu but, among the rich man could keep many wives. Restriction upon widow marriage was greatest tragedy mostly in upper caste Hindu women. Dowry system was compulsory custom which led infanticide and child marriage further it blocked education to them. Thus, Muslims women were better placed in certain aspects compared to Hindu. They could divorce their husbands, remarry and could claim their share in the property of their parents. Aim of study is to usher the difference in social status within women. Thus study is useful for micro History too.

Keywords:-Women, Purdah –System, Polygamy, Monogamy, Child-marriag, Devdasi, Remarriage Harem, Jauhar, Sati-Pratha -

Introduction:

According to studies, Women enjoyed equal right during the early Vedic period However, later Vedic age the status of women began decline with the Smiritis. There were only few example of Child marriage and custom of sati before middle age thus it had negligible effect on social status of women. History sees the rise of Raziya sultana during sultanate period in spite of it "Medieval India was dark age for the women" and Mughal era were even more distressful to women. Mughal established a great and stable kingdom in India and enrooted Islam, Many Hindu women converted in to Islam. Indian women were harshly affected as in Islamic tradition women were just the articles of pleasure of her husband, father and brothers. One more reason of deterioration of women's status was tradition of polygamy in Islam. It led threat upon Indian women. Indian women were shield for the safety within their houses, with contact of Muslim further Purdah system came to them hence freedom vanished. In this situation to save dignity and honour, child marriage took place which further restricted education of women. Dowry system was another social slur which gave birth of infanticide. Apart from above Sati- Pratha and Jauhar were the prominent social stigma of Hindu which made dreadful condition to them. This study is focused to comparative social degradation between Hindu and Muslims women. Primary and secondary sources

of literature along with prestigious journal and quality articles have been used to bring out the fact. This study would be useful while studying women at micro level.

Literature Review:

Women in India before Mughal period, although dependent upon & protected by men were enjoyed honorable status in society, it changed considerably at Mughals. There were so many evils prevalent which deteriorated the freedom and social life of women. The same study goes like this.

Social status of Muslims Women:

Aristocrat Muslim women were relished especial right and also had high social status in society .Women at the time of Babar enjoyed the opportunity to participate in political affair as per Mangol and Tamurid tradition but right to sovereignty was not given.[1] Babur writes "His Grandmother was very wise and farsighted and most of affairs of mine were carried out under her advice.[2] Women's participation in the politics under Mughal Empire depended on their ability rather than blood relations.[3] Women of importance were also helping to pardoning rebellion if they approached.

Harem was a most important institution of Mughal like Mansabdari and Jagirdari. Muslim women including few Hindu women enjoyed the power in Heram. The term Harem or Harem is derived from Arabic Harem which means sacred or forbidden. The word in Turkish, it was Seraglio and Zenana was in Persian a Harem is also referred to as Harem sarah, The Rajputs called it as Zenana dyodhi. Abul Fazl uses Sabistan-i-Iqbal which was the official terminology for Harem. The main inhabitants of Harem were the women members of the Emperor's close and some time distant family. The Mughals were known to provide shelter to needy relatives. Thus, royal and noble women from different countries sought refuge with the Mughals. Thus, In Harem there were women from Muslims and Hindu.[4] Christians were also there in harem.[5] The number of Begums, second wives, maids was in harem due to Polygamy. Akbar's harem had approximately 5000 women among them most important was emperor's mother. There were three distinct categories of wives as legal wives, inferior wives and concubines.[6] Mughal emperors did not restrict themselves to four legal marriages which were allowed by Islamic law. They married to other free women; it was inferior women by A.S. Bebridge. According to Ralph Fitch once the concubines also called sarari.[7] who were usually female slaves kept without legal marriage. They were solely or mainly for sexual enjoyment. Apart from above women of harem were bind with hierarchy and there were clear difference between begum and general women i.e., Agaha. Here it is pertinent to mention that top class women of harem had enjoyed power like Mansabdar as they also involved in the economic activities. Roshan Ara & Jahan Ara were the best example for it. Sometimes women of harem made important contribution while making reconcilement between emperor and prince when there were at clash.

Non-Muslim women entered into Mughal harem by the way of matrimonial alliances with some emperors and their sons. Sultan of Delhi also married Rajput princes but they never accorded same status to them as enjoyed by the Rajput wives of Mughals.

Polygamy was prevalent both among the Hindus and the Muslim at Mughal age, especially belonging to the richer sections of the society. It was matter of prestige of a man, if he had a number of wives in his harem but women were affected adversely physically and mentally. She had to struggle with the co-wives for securing her husband's favour. In respect of marriage, Muslim law permits a man to have four wives at a time subject to certain conditions. Although Akbar was in favour of monogamy, he himself violated his dictum by marrying as many as 300 wives without divorcing any one. Here in polygamous

system all the wives did not enjoy equal respect and facilities. Usually the chief Muslim wife enjoyed the favour of emperor and great luxuries however the younger ones were sure to become the cynosure of the eyes of their master.[8]

The veil or the 'Purdah' system was widely prevalent in Mughal period. This restricted the freedom of women and confined them to their homes. Further it also acted as a great hindrance to their education, they were compelled to discontinue their education to look after their household and take care of their children.[9]

Child marriage of girls was also prevalent in the society of both Hindu and Muslim. Ralph Fitch wrote that the people of India were eager to give their children in marriage at a very tender age.[10] still; women were given some sort of education privately, especially by kings, nobles and well to-do persons.

For the matter of inheritance Muslims women were better treated as compared with Hindu. According to Islamic law of inheritance daughter had equal right that of son.[11] Hindu women do not inherit father's properties except unmarried that was also one fourth of son. This was to be spent on marriage and her dowry.[12] Mehr in Islam was right of the women given by their husbands as bridal gifts in any form of movable and immovable property. Apart from their regular allowances the women also received grants of lands in form of madad-i mdsh. Royal ladies held Zamindaris, Milkiyat rights as well as rights on lands. They had the liberty of inheriting, selling and disposing of their properties.[13]

Prostitution was the evil custom of society. Prostitute or public women were many a time employed as dancers and singers on especial occasion. Some of them were highly accomplished ladies, adept in various arts and skills such as music, poetry, sorcery and spying. The habitation of these public women was set up outside the city which was generally called Shaitanpura or devils velle.[14]

Provision of female slaves or maids was also there similar to sultanate age. It included Indian girls as well as imported girls from China and Turkistan.[15] Enslavement was mainly through armed action by force in supposedly rebel or enemy areas and through sales of children by parents. Slavery was an institution of boundation, in this system slave women have no right to move or be free without the consent of master. Female slaves were of two kinds, one held dear and kept for pleasure and enjoyment, and the other virtually serving as a maid-servant doing rough domestic works like the drawing of water and grinding the corn.[16]

Social status of Hindu Women:

History says that Rajput princesses were given proper knowledge of administration, art, archery, poetry and politics etc. In Fact, the Hindu women had respect in their family, they participated in religious ceremonies and they were well educated. But In patriarchal society Hindu women afflicted by many evils like Sati-Pratha, Jauhar-Pratha, Dowry system, Child Marriage and Infanticide etc. Now they were denied to study of Vedas as well as higher studies. Women were considered inferior to the men in Islamic tradition and now it reflected upon Hindu women too. The plight of women can be imagined by one of the shloka of Tulsidas where he writes "Dhol, gawar, shudra, pashu, nari, ye sab tadan ke adhikari" means the animals, illiterates, lower castes and women should be subjected to beating.

Normally, monogamy was prevalent in the society but, among the rich a man could keep many wives. The widows were not allowed for marry again. They either became sati at the pyre of their husbands or passed their lives as women-hermits. Abul Fazl, while referring to the Hindus, writes, men were having no right to have more than one wife, unless his first wife is sickly or proves barren, or her children die. In these cases, he may marry ten wives, but if the tenth proves defective, he may not marry again.

Early or child marriage becomes universal features of the contemporary society of India according to the foreign chronicles and contemporary literary works abound numerous instances of child marriage

both in Hindu and Muslims girls rarely exceeded the age of 09 or 10 years.[17] In town and villages girls were married at the age of five or six years to the boy of age eight to ten years but they tied together until they were of 10 years.[18] This system created many unwanted problems to women like early motherhood, weak health of mothers, repeated birth, high rate of maternal mortality etc. Marriage after 50 years was not approved or appreciated by the society. Love and inter-caste marriages were not allowed. Thus girl child was the burden of parents.

The Muslims were always prepared either to molest or to capture Hindu women which brought Purdah-System in Hindu women. They were supposed to hide themselves for her safety; this system had affected women badly while attaining education and freedom to them. Generally aristocrat women remained behind purdah and followed by Hindu middle classes but certainly not among Hindu masses.[19]

Custom was prevailed to give some gifts at the time marriage before invasions of Islam but it became compulsory in the name of dowry. Now the girls were considered necessary burden of family and the compulsion led the custom of female infanticide. Now it was impossible to marry the girls to suitable bridegrooms without handsome dowry.[20] Due to this practice many poor and lower middle class families were ruined certainly it affected the high class of Muslims.[21]

In Hindu the death of husband was greatest tragedy and tradition of sati was dreadful. Restriction on marriage of upper caste widows was another tragedy however widows remarriage was not compulsory restriction among lower castes of Hindu.[22] Those widows who do not burn with their husbands' pyre were treated badly in society, their head be shaven as they are not allowed to keep long hair or put ornaments.[23] Widowhood was considered a punishment of the sins of previous life.[24] Special mention to Goa the widows who did not became sati had to go temple to earn money as public prostitute for up keeping and construction of temple in their district.[25] Monserrte says about sati that they were made insensible by certain drugs in order that they may feel no pain. Sometimes they were half-drugged; and before they lose their resolution, were hurried to the pyre with warning, prayers and promises of eternal fames. If they hesitate they were driven forcibly to the fire and if they try to leap off again, were held down with poles and hooks.[26] It was not applied on Muslim widows who could marry again after the death of her husband.

One more heartbroken social evil 'Jahaur' was there especially in Rajput. When defeat of Rajput kings were inevitable, women and children were left inside the fortress and brave Rajput used to fight gallantly till the death.[27] here women of fortress were to sacrifice while setting fires themselves to save the glory and honour from the enemies.[28]

The custom of Devdasi was took place in medieval Indian history in which a woman was considered the brides of God. The history of Devadasis speaks of complex sexual identities, misplaced sense of family, organized crime against lower castes and it was social stigma.[29] actually this was the example of sexual exploitation of women in the name of religion. Devadasi system was prevalent among the Hindus. Beautiful unmarried girls were offered to images of God sin temples where they passed their lives as maid¬servants of gods. It was not only serious injustice to their lives but also resulted in corruption in temples.

Discussion:

In close examination of above fact, it came that Hindus women accepted some changes in their clothing, food habits and social customs in the influence of Muslims also converted to Islam. Particularly upper caste women were facing ruthless tradition of sati pratha and Jauhar. Hindu widows were better chosen

to be sati than to live with social stigma as it was considered the sin of previous life. Women of Hindu followed Pradah system due to fear of frequent molestation by Muslims, brought more pathetic situation to the Hindu women as it blocked education and freedom to them. Dowry system was institutional at Mughal age and it made girls child burden of family further gave birth of another evil of society as infanticide and child marriage. Child marriage brought further implications for women like early motherhood, weak health of mothers, repeated birth, and high rate of maternal mortality. Prostitution and Devdasi system also deteriorated the condition of Hindu women though in Hindu there was a system of monogamy but upper caste women preyed to polygamy in harem and they were controlled by chief Muslim wife. However, the women of lower strata of Hindu population remained free from many of these social evils. There was no purdah system in them and their women were free to divorce and remarry. Even widow-marriages were permitted among them.

Muslim women also did not enjoy a respectable status in the society. Polygamy was widely prevalent among the Muslims. Every Muslim had a right to keep at least four wives and many maids. Purdha-System was strictly observed among Muslim-women. They were devoid of education because of this social-custom. However, they were better placed in certain respects as compared to Hindu women. They could divorce their husbands, remarry and could claim their share in the property of their parents apart form it Muslim women were not afflicted by Sati and Jouhar-System as that of Hindu upper caste women.

Conclusion:

Thus, it can be concluded that condition of women under Mughal was much inferior in comparison to previous period. Both Hindu and Muslim women faced many social evils under patriarchal society of Mughal, However with the above fact It can be concluded that upper caste Hindu women were more afflicted than that of Muslims women during aforesaid period.

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